

The Run Doctor

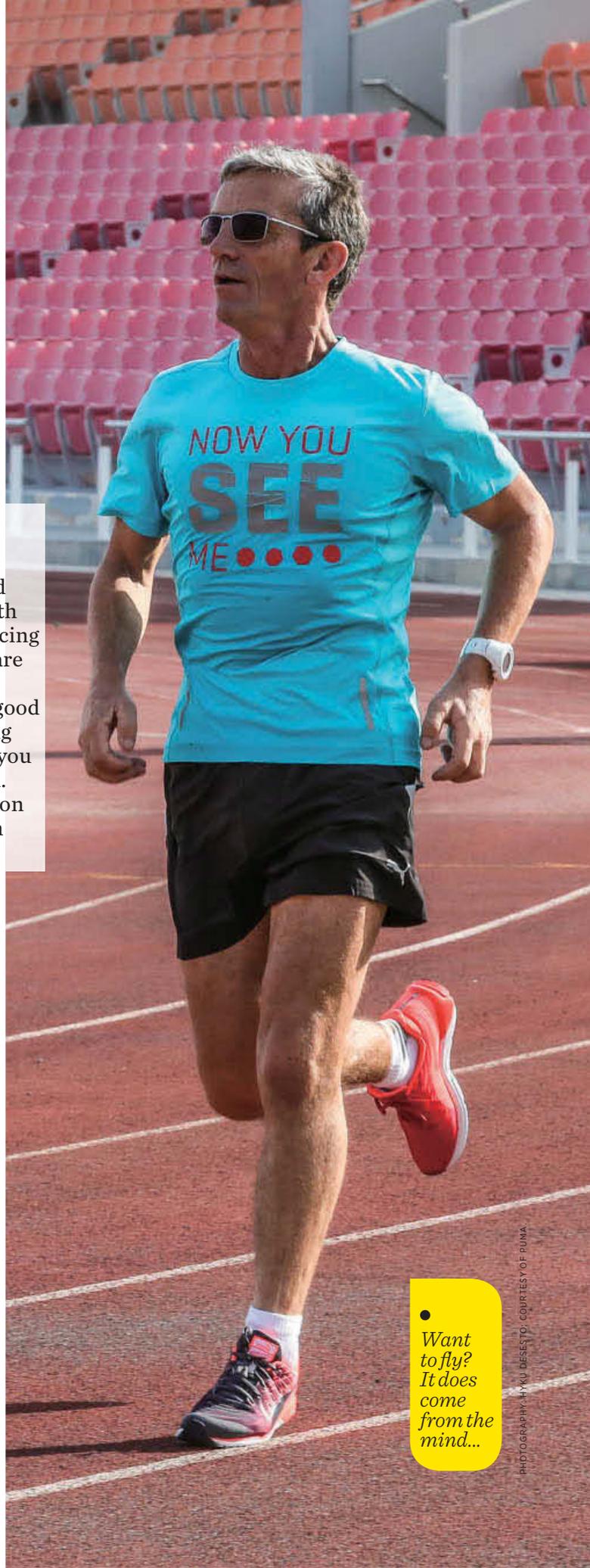
Always try to find an excuse not to go running? Ultramarathoner Norrie Williamson helps you bust them all. *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*

Running is a pretty polarising sport—for many of us, it's either something you love or hate. If you're in the #IHateCardio camp, we get it. Honest. In fact, we used to be in it too (seriously, ask anyone on Women's Health Middle East). But we gritted our teeth, laced up our racing shoes, and stuck to it—and believe it or not, grew to, dare we say, actually kinda love going for a good run.

Whether it's the therapeutic aspect (some say it's as good as meditation), the powerful feeling you get from being able to cover those distances, or just the way it makes you sweat, there's a reason why so many people love to run. We spoke to renowned endurance coach, ultramarathon triathlete and athlete, and all-around running veteran Norrie Williamson to help you up your running game.

Norrie is no stranger to helping people figure out how to not only love to run, but how to love it—and he's determined to prove that just about anyone can run a marathon. In fact, in 1989, he penned a book called *Everyman's Guide to Distance Running*, which included a training program for hopeful ultramarathon runners. And he should know—while he is a proud completer of more ultra-marathons, triathlons and races than we can count, works with brands like Puma, and is a highly sought-after endurance coach, by trade, he's actually a professional structural and civil engineer. "People have got it wrong—it's not about the distance, it's about effective training. And there's actually only two aspects to effective training. One, you're like a hybrid car. It works when you're just cruising along very

easily, using the battery. As humans, we metabolise fat. It doesn't mean you use that for losing weight—and that's the base. With that, you can carry on forever—like a hybrid car, it just keeps running. We've got enough energy within us to run around the world, if we keep within that energy level. The other end is to make the engine bigger. You do that with short, fast repetitions. So instead of people going out there and doing 10 or 5 kilometres every day and worrying about the figures, all you need to do is to have one long run and a couple of faster sessions per week, and that's it. The other areas you're looking for to improve are core and functional training at the gym, such as suspension training. Even something like three sets of four minutes is enough. So if we keep that as a background,



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*Want to fly?
It does come from the mind...*

PHOTOGRAPHY: HYKU DESESTO, COURTESY OF PUMA

and the long and slow run is so easy that you're running at a heart rate that is 180 minus your age, and you only need to do anything between 60 to 2.5 hours if you want to go for a marathon, that's it. You'll get fitter, faster—the whole works. Keeping that in mind, let's look at the excuses," Norrie says.

The Excuse

"I always get shin splints so I can't run—or at least not far or fast, because it'll hurt me."

Norrie Says

Shin splints is a wide term, but one of the major reasons why they happen is because people are wearing shoes that have too high of a heel at the back, and are rigid. So you'll hear yourself run when you're running, and it'll be a loud noise slapping down with every footstep. Running, as opposed to jogging, is about landing on the ball of your foot. If anyone says you must run heel to toe, this is incorrect—the easiest way to prove that when you're running, is to take your shoes off and just run across a floor. Immediately, you'll land on the ball of your foot. So in order to be able to do that with a shoe, you can't go higher than about 12mm difference between the heel and the midsole. If it is, it tends to force you to land heel to toe, which means you'll land on the outside and slap the ground if it's a rigid shoe. A less rigid shoe will allow you some flexibility. It doesn't matter what the speed is, it just depends on where you land on the ball of your foot, how you should be landing when you run. Shin splints thus usually comes down to your choice in shoes. Which is why one of the things I usually focus on when holding



Norrie's run clinic in Dubai Sports City, hosted exclusively by Puma Middle East

workshops is teaching people how to run correctly.

The Excuse

I'm afraid to do it since it's bad for my joints, isn't it?

Norrie Says

Again, this can be solved by choosing the right shoe and employing the right running technique. Usain Bolt, for instance, runs in spikes. He's putting his foot forward, landing with his spike on the track, and then pulling towards the point where it's underneath him, then he pushes forward. Distance running is about putting your foot down just directly below your centre of gravity, and pushing back—so the focus is on pushing back. When you put your foot forward, you're actually stopping yourself, and that's why you start getting joint pains. Of course, there's an adaptation to this, especially if you've done nothing for years. When we walk, we share the load between two legs. When we run, we're taking our whole weight multiplied by three,

because of the impact, onto one leg. So there has to be some kind of adaptation. The sign of muscle soreness is actually your body telling you that you're adapting. Training by definition is making small micro-tears in the muscle, and then giving it enough recovery that the muscle grows back [stronger]—so your stimulation to muscle growth is small damage. So a small damage is actually a minor injury, and training is about getting loads of minor injuries that can regenerate in a matter of days. Nutrition also plays a big part. If you are in the right running shoes that allow you the adequate amount of flexibility, and you're taught how to run correctly—especially here where we are so blessed with some great synthetic tracks, and the facilities here are phenomenal—you won't feel the pressure in the wrong places, hurting your joints.

The Excuse

"I'm only good at sprinting and can't handle long distances, while my friends can only run long distances but are rubbish at sprinting. We just can't do the opposite."

Norrie Says

It's all about pacing yourself

and how you breathe. You could, if you wanted to, run a marathon tomorrow and be ok—even if right now, you think that you couldn't necessarily run that amount because you're used to sprinting short distances. You have to pick a pace that suits your ability and level of fitness, and you also need to have the desire and motivation to do it. If you have those two things, you can go as far as you want to. Everyone can go the distance, even if we're not all gifted at being fast. It's all about picking the correct pace for your ability—and you learn that by experience, and by mixing walking and running. When you're running in intervals, there's no difference between the interval you



You just need to have the
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far as you need to go /



choose and one someone else would choose, and you can keep going a lot longer if you pick one that's suited to your ability. And choosing to run in intervals is completely okay—I have coached a number of people who have achieved their best time by running and walking in intervals. There is nothing wrong with them—it's about working to your body's best ability and state. People often think they're competing against each other, when you're really competing with yourself. Even the champions at the front use the other guys up there to help beat their own times.

The Excuse

"I often get a stitch in my side when I run too much, or at all"

Norrie Says

"Again, this is often about pacing, as well as controlling your breathing. If you start a race by running too fast, and

Norrie Says

From a health point of view, it's better to be doing some cardio. There's also a belief that overdoing cardio is bad for you. So you've got to get a balance. At the same time it's also about enjoyment. I can't say you have to do it through running, but there's so many ways to get in cardio, from skipping to elliptical for instance—swimming is cardio as well, and cycling can serve that purpose as well. For me, running is one of the most enjoyable sports out there.

The Excuse

"I really don't enjoy running, and even if many people say they love it, I find it boring. How can I make it more fun so I'd actually want to do it?"

Norrie Says

One thing I would suggest to make running more enjoyable is to start slowly—run with someone who you know is a

Start slowly: Your body has to warm up and come to the right pace naturally

then your body has to catch up in terms of physiology. Another factor could be if you're eating too soon before a workout, or not eating too much or too little, or even not drinking enough throughout the day before a run and then drinking too much just before it. When you're thinking about your pace, your body has to warm up and come up to the right pace naturally. If you start slowly enough before coming up to your right pace, your body and breathing will adapt accordingly, and then you won't get a stitch.

The Excuse

"I hate cardio—do I have to run or can I just stick with weights... or at the very least, just do activities like HIIT or boxing instead?"

slower runner. A third of the time, run with someone slower than you, another third of the time run with someone faster than you, and a third of the time, run by yourself. Assuming you want to progress with it, you have to keep doing it until it becomes a habit. Often, many people intend to go for a run after work, only to wind up too tired after a long day at the office—and the reason why we often feel so lethargic at the end of the day is that we sit there slumped over at a desk all day, which impacts the body and reduces mobility. This is typically easier in the morning, since so many of us are tired after work. Try incorporating a morning run instead, until it becomes a habit. One day, it will! ■